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Iraq: The Growing Influence of Military Officers From Mosul

The appointment in mid-October of an Army general from Mosul as head of Iraq's most important security service underscores the increasing influence of senior officials from Mosul, apparently at the expense of clansmen from President Saddam Husayn's hometown of Tikrit. Although the Moslawis are apparently loyal to Saddam, this grouping is now better positioned to move against him if they perceive a deterioration in Iraq's military and economic situation.

Background

President Saddam Husayn is placing increasing confidence in Army and Air Force officers from the large northern city of Mosul. Until recently, Saddam relied heavily on relatives and clansmen from his small hometown of Tikrit to monitor and control the Ba'th Party, the military, the government, and the security services.

Inhabitants of the Mosul region comprise less than 10 percent of Iraq's population, Tikritis less than 1 percent.

In mid-October, however, Saddam removed his Tikriti half brothers from key positions: Barzan, former director of the Gen. Intelligence Directorate (Mukhabarat); Sab'awi, another senior Mukhabarat officer; and Watban, Governor of Salah ad-Din Province. The half brothers incurred Saddam's wrath by opposing his daughter's marriage to a cousin of Saddam rather than to their nephew, by directing Mukhabarat excesses, and by presuming that Saddam's continued rule depended on their support.

Saddam has nearly completed a purge of 700 Mukhabarat officials—mostly from Tikrit—suspected of loyalty to Barzan.

The same source reports that the new chief, Gen. Hisham Sabah al-Fakhri,

Selected Prominent Officials From Mosul Government

- Taha Yasin Ramadan, First Deputy Prime Minister, member of the Revolutionary Command Council and the Ba'th Party Regional Command, and head of the People's Army.
- Tariq Aziz, Minister of Foreign Affairs.
- Qasim Ahmad Taqi 'Urabi, Minister of Oil.
- Hisham Hasan Tawfiq, Minister of Finance.
- Hassan Tawfiq al-Najafi, Governor of the Central Bank.

Military

- Gen. Abd al-Jabbar Shanshal, Army Chief of Staff.
- Gen. Jawad Thanun, Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations.
- Gen. Muhammad Fathi, Deputy Chief of Staff for Administration.
- Gen. Muhammad Jassim al-Jaburi, Air Force Commander.
- Gen. Rashid Yunis, 1st Division Commander.
- Gen. Husayn Rashid Muhammad, 3rd Division Commander.
- Col. Riyadh Taha, 1st Republican Brigade Commander.

former commander of the Army's IV Corps, has appointed many officers from his native town of Mosul in their place. The strength of the Mukhabarat at 40,000.

Moslawis in the Government

Moslawis are well represented in the government and in the military. They include the powerful First Deputy Prime Minister Taha Yasin Ramadan,

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reportedly a rival of Saddam, and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Oil, and Finance. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Moslawi military officers include the Army chief of staff and his two deputies and several commanding generals, [REDACTED]

Why Mosul?

The strong military tradition of Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, has led many of its residents to join the armed forces. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] A military career offers social and economic advancement for aspiring youth who lack advanced education. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Moslawis comprised one-fourth to one-third of the Army officers in 1958. Based on the large numbers of Moslawis observed in high places, we believe that Moslawi officers comprise at least 10 percent of all officers—Mosul's proportion in the overall population. Moslawi officers probably seek to advance their clansmen in the military. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] ties among Moslawis are strong. [REDACTED]

How Loyal?

Reports questioning Moslawi loyalty have circulated repeatedly in the last two years:

[REDACTED] several prominent Sunni citizens from Mosul had openly spoken against Saddam. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] security officials had previously considered Sunni leaders in Mosul to be solidly behind the regime. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] some military officers believe that their Moslawi counterparts have greater loyalty to other members of their clique than to the military command structure or the ruling Ba'th Party to which they belong. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the weak Communist Party of Iraq (CPI) draws heavily from the Sunni Arabs of the Mosul area. [REDACTED]

the CPI claims progress in rebuilding cells, principally among junior officers within the armed forces. [REDACTED]

Despite these reports, we have no evidence that senior Moslawi officers are disloyal to Saddam. We believe that some reports are based on jealousy or wishful thinking that, since the Moslawis have obtained key positions, they must be plotting Saddam's ouster. [REDACTED]

Implications

We believe Saddam is still firmly in control in Baghdad. He maintains control of the government, the military, and the ruling Ba'th Party apparatus and has personal and official networks of informants. We believe Saddam will exploit his networks, which include various regional factions, to watch for signs of early coup plotting and move preemptively—a technique he has refined through frequent practice. [REDACTED]

Popular demands are likely to mount for decisive leadership to end the war with Iran that Saddam started. We estimate that the Iraqis have already lost more than 60,000 lives—equivalent to 960,000 deaths in a population the size of the United States—in a seemingly endless war. A deteriorating economy and the prospect of still more import cutbacks in 1984 will necessitate further sacrifices by the public. [REDACTED]

Meanwhile, in our judgment, the purge and the growing influence of the Moslawis probably have created resentment among at least some Tikritis. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] tensions have developed between longtime Mukhabarat officers and newly appointed Moslawis. Moslawi military officers suspect that Tikritis may be behind several recent automobile "accidents" befalling Moslawis on the road between Baghdad and Tikrit. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In our judgment, these frictions are likely to reduce the effectiveness of the Mukhabarat. [REDACTED]

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In such an atmosphere, the armed forces and particularly the Moslawi officers would be well placed to move against Saddam. The Army has played a critical role in almost every successful coup attempt in Iraq. Saddam is well aware of the threat. He has successfully reduced the military's influence in Iraqi decisionmaking and filled the military leadership with officers loyal to him. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Continued setbacks in the war with Iran will test this loyalty. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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